12/09/2022

ADDRESS By His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America At the Ordination of Archdeacon Philotheos Tomczewski to the Holy Priesthood



Beloved Archdeacon Philotheos,

Your years of service as a deacon and archdeacon of this God-protected Metropolis of New Jersey have now come to their consummation. And like any true commencement, you are only at the beginning of your ministry.

Here, in the presence of family and the many, many friends you have in the Metropolis and beyond, you ascend the next step of the one and holy Order of Melchizedek – the Priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ. You now take on the awesome responsibility of a Presbyter of the Church of God. With this responsibility comes a different aspect of ministry – the mission of being a pastor to a flock.

As you know, the deaconate commenced as service to tables, so as to liberate the Apostles from mundane duties.[*] Through the centuries, though, this service to tables became service to the Holy Altar, as well as a ministry focused around the

Bishops of the Church. Nevertheless, your advancement to the Honorable Presbyterate in no way curtails your service to the Holy Altar – in fact, it enhances it.

For the Presbyter in front of the Altar (not to the side, as is the Deacon), is the representative of the Ruling Bishop in the local parish. Therefore, beloved Archdeacon Philotheos, you will now bear this imprint of episcopal authority. In the doubling of your stole, so that it folds over both your shoulders, you are yoked to the ministry of the Divine Liturgy. And in the fact that you will now kneel upon both knees – not just the one, as you did at your diaconal ordination – you will receive the grace of the Holy Spirit to serve in the capacity of Presbyter.

As such, your first assignment will be your home parish of the Annunciation Cathedral in Baltimore, from which our beloved Brother, His Grace Bishop-Elect Constantine of Sassima, is departing for new ministries after decades of faithful, pious and successful service to your home community. I truly feel a wonderful sense of continuity and commitment that is exemplified by the both of you as faithful sons of the Annunciation Cathedral; for you both have deep roots in this historic parish. However, let us not forget that the first, full-time priest of the Cathedral, Father Constantine Douropoulos, was ordained by Saint Nektarios. This legacy of piety and faith has endured through the decades, and it was particularly cultivated by the late Father Constantine Monios, whose ministry at the Cathedral was an abiding inspiration to all, and had a great impact on you and your loved ones.

Therefore, Archdeacon Philotheos, your ordination here today and your forthcoming service to the Cathedral of Baltimore is a completion of one circle of your life, which commences a deeper journey.

You begin your ministry as a priest and your vocation to be a shepherd of the People of God. And you are called to be a good shepherd, in imitation of the Lord Who said:

“The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sake of the sheep.”[†]

My dear Archdeacon Philotheos,

Your ministry will be that of a true shepherd, who protects and feeds his sheep with the pure teaching of our Holy Orthodox Faith. You will guide them to the verdant pastures, which have been cultivated for centuries by the holy Fathers, together with the great theologians and Saints of our Church. You will nourish them with the Sacred Body and Precious Blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, which is the

essential action of our Priesthood.

Therefore, when you lead the Divine Services, pray always as if it was your first Liturgy, your last Liturgy and your only Liturgy. If you retain this priestly consciousness throughout your ministry, you will ever stand in the grace of God, and be nourished yourself, even as you feed the flock.

And so, cultivate your inner life and dwell with God in your heart, where you will find the strength and wisdom to serve the People of God, leading them by your humble example of love, compassion and humility.

Enter now, into this joyful service of the Lord. Amen.

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